

# Open Research Online

---

The Open University's repository of research publications and other research outputs

## Reading the actress in commedia imagery

### Book Section

#### How to cite:

Katritzky, M.A. (2005). Reading the actress in commedia imagery. In: Brown, Pamela Allen and Parolin, Peter eds. *Women players in England 1500-1660: beyond the all-male stage*. Studies in performance and early modern drama. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, pp. 109-143.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

© [\[not recorded\]](#)

Version: Version of Record

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:

<https://www.ashgate.com/shopping/title.asp?key1=&key2=&orig=results&isbn=0%207546%200953%207>

---

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online's data [policy](#) on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.

---

[oro.open.ac.uk](http://oro.open.ac.uk)

## Chapter 6

# Reading the Actress in Commedia Imagery

M. A. Katritzky

There is a venerable tradition of scholarship on the pioneering actresses of the early modern Italian stage. But mainstream theater history has been slow to absorb its findings, and many studies of the *commedia dell'arte* focus primarily on its comic male “masks.” Only recently has emphasis on the colorful and distinctive stock roles given way to wider recognition that studying female roles and players is not an intriguing sideline, but essential to understanding the importance of the *commedia* to Western theater.<sup>1</sup> The spectacular success of early *prima donnas* created a radical change in theatrical gender dynamics that transformed the art of the *comici*, profoundly influenced the English theater before the advent of actresses, and paved the way for the modern professional stage.

Women had been performing in Europe and England long before the *commedia dell'arte* created the first female stars.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, *commedia* troupes are rightly credited with pioneering the systematic promotion of

---

1 This chapter is dedicated to the memory of Elizabeth Howe, whose contribution to the history of women on the stage is an inspiration to her former colleagues and students in the Literature Department of The Open University, and to theater historians worldwide. I wish to thank Pamela Allen Brown for motivating, and radically shaping, this adaptation of several sections of my 1995 DPhil thesis, and the Trustees of the Elizabeth Howe Fund for research support during the period 2002–2004. Translations, unless otherwise noted, are mine. The author of this chapter has made every effort to contact the copyright holders of the photographs here reproduced.

2 Modern scholarship dates the introduction of actresses into Italian troupes to the early 1560s, often citing the remark by renowned actor Pier Maria Cecchini in 1614 that “it was less than 50 years ago that women appeared in costume on stage” (Lea 114; Falconieri 1954, 41; MacNeil 2003, 2). Amateur all-female acting had a long tradition in European convents. Vigil Raber, director of the 1514 Bolzano Passion Play, assigned virtually all its female roles to local women amateurs (Katritzky, 2004, 105–106). Neither were amateur actresses unknown in sixteenth-century



professional actresses as celebrity performers. By the 1560s, prima donnas were a star attraction of the Italian companies, contributing significantly to their tremendous audience impact. The reconstruction of these women's contributions through written documents is far from straightforward, however, and the surviving visual material can greatly extend our understanding of early actresses and female roles. The commedia's transitory nature, with its reliance on improvisation, non-verbal entertainment, and scenarios or plot summaries, in addition to plays based on fully written-out scripts, makes visual records particularly important. Until comparatively recently, "the systematic codifying, dating and interpretation of the prints, drawings, paintings and frescos relating to the [commedia]," which are fundamental to assessing how far the visual record reflects early modern stage practice, had "barely begun" (Heck, 293). This essay examines commedia dell'arte actresses in the context of the pictorial record. Still under-researched by comparison with the textual documentation, these images indicate that the advent of the women player was a key catalyst in the expansion of the commedia beyond its dual roots in theater, especially humanist comedy, and in popular culture, including mountebank activity and carnival ritual. The visual record, which depicts female *comici* in a rich diversity of performance types and places, vividly suggests the widening impact of female stage roles and women's increasing integration into the acting profession.

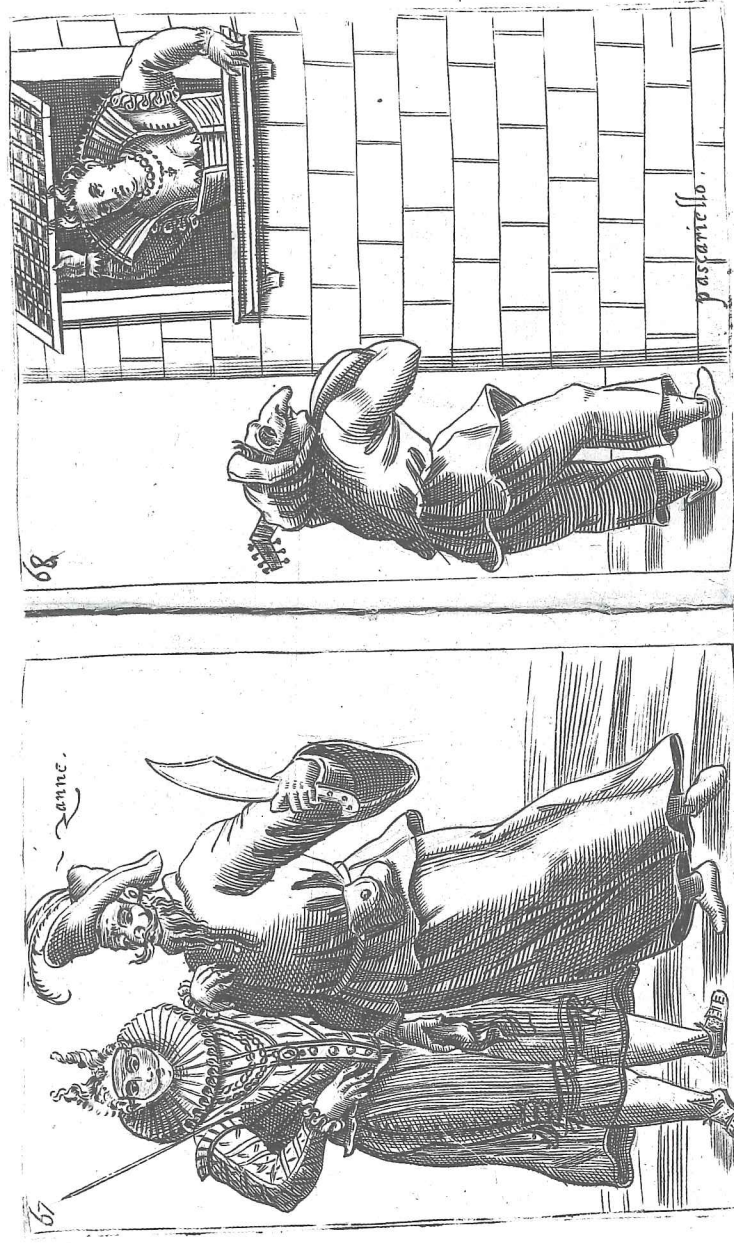
The earliest formal record of an Italian actress joining a professional troupe is a Roman contract of 10 October 1564, in which Lucretia of Siena and six men agree to form a company to perform comedies (Re, appendix). Mixed gender troupes such as Lucretia's burst onto the mid-sixteenth-century European stage with a hybrid vigor and fertile creativity achieved by fusing the disparate skills of amateur actors, professional fools and buffoons, carnival revellers, courtesans, and street performers, such as mountebank troupes, acrobats, musicians, and dancers (figs 6.1–6.7). Although improvisation is often singled out as the defining characteristic of commedia dell'arte players, they presented fully scripted plays, *intermedi* and other musical theater by leading writers and composers, in addition to fully or partially improvised comedies, pastorals, tragedies and melodramas, shorter *bufonarie* and *momarie*, and set pieces based on instrumental music, singing, mime, dancing, and acrobatics.

England in cycle drama, Lord Mayor's shows, and elsewhere (Bevington 166; also see essays in Part I of this volume). French professional actresses are recorded from 1545, when Marie Ferré [or Fairet] first trod the boards (Scott).



6.1 Pieter de Jode after Lodewyk Toeput (c.1550–c.1603/5), *Masquerade*.





6.2 Pietro Bertelli, *Zanne with a courtesan, Pascariello with a courtesan* (1591), from Bertelli's *Diversarum* [m] nationum habitus, iconibus in aere incisus.



6.3 Julius Goltzius, *Magnificus larvatus, Scortum Venetum Larvatum, il Zani famulus* (1581).





6.4 A masked woman flanked by two men in Zanni costume (1596).

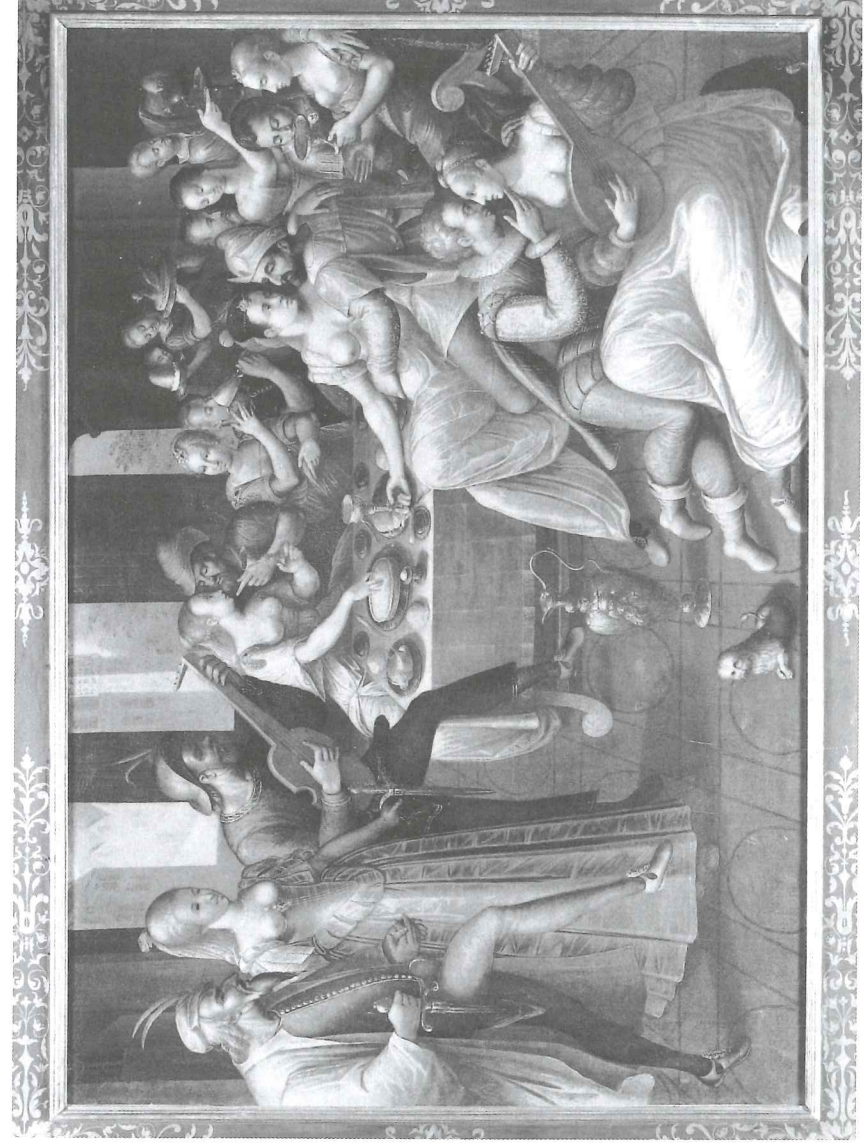


6.5 *Freund sein khan nit schaden* [it can't hurt to be friends], from the friendship album (1583–1601) of Hans Jakob Wintholtz (c.1583).





6.6 Joseph Heintz II (c. 1600–78), *Carnival in Venice* (detail: dancing *Zanni* and woman on a mountebank stage).



6.7 *A feast*, by or after Marten de Vos (1532–1603).







6.10 *Italian comedians on stage* (late sixteenth century).6.11 Ambrose I Francken, *Italian comedians* (late sixteenth century).









6.14 Title pages to two commedia scenarios in the early seventeenth-century manuscript *Raccolta di scenari più scelti* [...].



6.15 Scene from the Italian comedy (c.1600?).



Actresses competed for the part of the *innamorata*, the literary, educated, agile, beautiful, elegant, and performatively skilled romantic heroine, capable of declaiming, singing, dancing, jesting, miming, and memorizing (figs 6.8–6.11).<sup>3</sup> Talented women soon vied with actors in all theatrical spheres, as performers, leading stage attractions, and sometimes even as the writers and troupe leaders responsible for the major artistic and business decisions governing their companies. Vittoria Piisimi of Ferrara, who took the stage name “Fioretta,” followed Vicenza Armani of Venice (fatally poisoned in 1569) as *prima donna* of the Gelosi troupe, and combined acting with a highly successful career as a troupe leader. Thomaso Porcacchi praised Piisimi in 1574 as “a most unique woman,” and a decade later Tomaso Garzoni called her the “divine Vittoria, a compendium of all the arts, a perfect actress.” While that encomium would seem hard to outdo, Garzoni reserves his highest praise for “the gracious Isabella,” referring to Isabelli Andreini of the Gelosi (Baschet, 61; Garzoni, 753–4). Adding to the luster of Isabella’s stage persona was her literary talent: her polished literary output gained her international renown as a playwright, poet and correspondent (see fig. 7.1 in Julie Campbell’s essay, this volume). Like Vittoria, Isabella’s daughter-in-law Virginia Andreini (“Florinda”) and Drusiano Martinelli’s wife Angelica Alberghini led early troupes. From the 1580s to at least 1605 Diana Ponti of Ferrara – one of several actresses who took the stage name “Lavinia” – led the Desiosi troupe, whose actresses so impressed Montaigne that he visited them in 1581 after their shows in Pisa, and arranged for them to receive presents of fish (Lea, 269).

Seeing women play women quickly became fashionable at the upper reaches of society. When Henri III of France came to Venice in 1574, he expressed the wish to see “the woman named Vittoria” act with her troupe, the Gelosi (Baschet, 57–8). Soon the *comici* were drawing Italian audiences away from the amateur players of the regular comedy, who always used males for women’s roles. Their popularity made it commercially viable for them to earn a year-round living from performing, at court, in private houses, in the *stanze* they rented for semi-public performances, and in the new theaters then being built. Despite this temporal expansion, carnival remained their most profitable season, creating such demand that even the nobility often had difficulty in persuading their favorite troupes to serve them. Even dukes routinely experienced refusals that would be hard to imagine at the equivalent social level

3 See Brown, 403. Taviani and Schino speculate that early commedia actresses were learned courtesans with skills suited to theater (335). Their view is challenged by McGill, who argues women may have acquired performance and improvisation skills orally (59–61), and Scott, who proposes a multiplicity of models for the emergence of actresses (152).

in England.<sup>4</sup> The Medici took no chances for the spectacular 1589 wedding of Ferdinand de’ Medici and Christina of Lorraine, which featured entertainments that constituted a “transitional landmark in the increasing role of women” in Renaissance theater (Saslow, 53). Hundreds of musicians, dancers, and singers were hired to perform in five *intermedi*, musical entertainments performed between the acts of plays. Although men were cast in the overwhelming majority of female and male roles, these *intermedi* broke new ground by starring three women. Two of the composer-performers, Antonio Archilei and Giulio Caccini, cast their wives, respectively the dancer, instrumentalist, and singer Vittoria Concarini and the singer Lucia Caccini, as *prima* and *seconda donna*. “Margherita,” who was Archilei and Concarini’s pupil, sang several supporting roles, and more women may have joined the cast at a later stage (Saslow, 54). These *intermedi* framed the acts of Girolamo Bargagli’s scripted play *La pellegrina*, performed by all-male amateur actors, and two commedia plays, both staged by the Gelosi troupe. In these plays, *La Zingara* and *La pazzia d’Isabella*, the rival *prima donnas* Vittoria Piisimi and Isabella Andreini strove to outdo each other, and their brilliant performances as the gypsy (Piisimi) and the madwoman (Andreini) became a highlight of the wedding festivities.

While highly complex and luxurious, the Medici wedding was certainly not the first royal entertainment to employ professional actresses. Less than a decade after the advent of women players on the Italian professional stage in the 1560s, the mixed-gender companies were traveling beyond Italy to display their skills before the courts of northern Europe, including that of Elizabeth I. In the late 1570s, Drusiano Martinelli of Mantua led a troupe across the Alps. They played a nine-month season in Antwerp to October 1577, before traveling on to Paris and, in January 1578, England. Here, in spite of the plague prohibitions, the Lord Mayor and Privy Council of the City of London granted permission for “one Drousiano, an Italian, a commediante, and his companye” to perform within the city from January 1578 until the first week of Lent (Schrickx, 803). Flemish documents relating to this tour name all eight men of the troupe of eleven, including Drusiano’s brother Tristano, depicted in the *Recueil Fossard* woodcuts and their iconographic derivatives (figs. 6.8, 6.9) as

4 In 1580, the Duke of Ferrara had trouble luring the best Gelosi players back from the Venice carnival, and Vittoria Piisimi and her husband Giovanni Pelesini wrote him letters of apology for being unavailable to entertain at two court weddings, including the Duke’s own to Margherita Farnese (Solerti and Lanza, 165, 168). In 1583, Francesco Andreini wrote to Vincenzo Gonzaga, apologizing on behalf of himself and his wife Isabella for declining the Duke’s invitation to perform at his forthcoming wedding to Eleonora de’ Medici. Andreini cites prior obligations, being “bound by faith to the Gelosi, and in particular to Sig. Alvise Michiel, patron of the hall in Venice” (Lea, 308; MacNeil 2003, 6–7, 272–3).



Harlequin, the role he was to create around the year 1584 (Schrickx, 798). The troupe's three women, noted but not named by the documents, precede the official sanctioning of actresses on post-Restoration London stages by over eighty years (Howe, 20). Although the personnel of troupes often fluctuated rapidly, Spanish documents of the following decade are pertinent to the identities of Martinelli's actresses, who are significant for being among the first, and perhaps *the* first, women to feature in full-length plays on the English stage. These records are special licenses of 1587 allowing Drusiano, his wife Angelica Alberghini, his brother Tristano, their companions Angela Salomona and her (unnamed) husband, and "La Franceschina" to perform in Madrid (Falconieri 1957, 74–5).<sup>5</sup> In doing so, they identify the women of "Los Confidentes Italianos" as the first actresses in full-length plays on the Spanish stage – and their troupe as including veterans of the English tour of 1578.

Humbler female players also left their mark on foreign audiences. Prince Ferdinand of Bavaria was greatly impressed by the tumbling skills of a "young girl aged eleven or twelve," the star of a troupe of four Italian acrobats who performed for him in Trent in 1565 (fos. 42v–43r). Several years before Drusiano's troupe came to England, Italian women acrobats crossed the Channel to perform, scandalizing Thomas Norton, who in 1574 inveighed against "that unnecessarie and scarslie honeste resorts to plaies ... and especiallie the assemblies to the unchaste, shamelesse and unnaturall tomlinges of the Italion Woemen" (Lea, 354). English writers generally treated female players, regardless of whether they had speaking parts, with mocking contempt, degrading them by associating them with prostitutes. Thomas Nashe famously dismissed the celebrated Italian actresses as "whores and common Curtizens" and reduced their plays to the antics of "a Pantaloun, a Whore, and a Zanie" (Nashe, 215; see figs. 6.3 and 6.7 for such trios). The actor and troupe leader Dionisio, who, as "Scoto of Mantua" conjured, and possibly performed with a troupe, before Queen Elizabeth I in 1576 (Herford and Simpson, 704), is branded by Ben Jonson's Corvino as a "damned mountebank ... a common rogue ... fiddling in ... the *osteria*," his actress as a "tumbling whore," and their repertoire as "forcèd tricks" (*Volpone*, II.6, 10–16). John Marston's 1599 reference to a "nimbling tumbling *Angelica*" is taken by some as evidence for Angelica Alberghini's presence during the Martinelli brothers' 1578 English tour, or even as an indication of an otherwise undocumented later British visit by the troupe (110). More relevant to the presence of Italian actresses in Elizabethan England is a passage in John Day's *The Travailes of The Three English Brothers*, a play of 1607 that draws on the

<sup>5</sup> Franceschina here may refer to the stage name of Silvia Roncaglia of Bergamo or, more likely, to the male actor Carlo or Carletto, who played the servetta Franceschina in Angelica's troupe throughout the 1590s.

overseas adventures of Anthony, Robert, and Thomas Shirley. In a much-quoted scene, Sir Anthony Shirley, to whom a visit by the English stage clown William Kemp in Rome is historically documented for 1601, invites Kemp and "an Italian Harlaken" to improvise a performance at his Italian residence (Lea, 350). The two clowns launch into an extended dialogue – with sexual innuendo robust enough to suggest that pictures such as figure 6.5 may have more than tenuous links to actual stage practice:

- KEMP. Now, Signior, how many are you in companie?  
 HARL. None but my wife and my selfe, sir.  
 K. Your wife! Why hearke you, wil your wife do tricks in publique?  
 H. My wife can play.  
 K. The honest woman, I make no question ... Your wife plaid the Curtizan.  
 H. True.

(Nicoll 1931, 280)

English travelers' accounts of European performances emphasize the rarity of women performers back home. Actresses are treated as a newsworthy attraction and a significant innovation that was changing the theatrical landscape of early modern Europe. Fynes Moryson, who went to Italy in the 1590s, reports that "in Florence they had a house where all the yeare long a Commedy was played by professed players once in the weeke and no more, and the partes of women were played by wemen, and the cheefe Actors had not their parts fully penned, but spake much extempory or upon agreement betweene themselves, espetially the wemen, whose speeches were full of wantonnes, though not grosse baudry" (631). In 1608 Lord Herbert of Cherbury noted as a novelty that Italians performing in Paris featured "women [who] play boys" (Lea, 179). That year, in Venice, Thomas Coryat "saw women acte, a thing that I never saw before, though I have heard that it hath beene sometimes used in London, and they performed it with as good a grace, action, gesture and whatsoever convenient for a Player, as ever I saw any masculine Actor" (386).

For some actresses, superb musical gifts and a phenomenal ability to memorize quickly were the graces underpinning their success. In 1574, Vittoria Piisimi starred – at a week's notice – in the most demanding singing role of the Gelosi's production of Cornelio Frangipani's *Tragedia* (MacNeil 2003, 11–12). In 1608, the professional singer Caterina Martinelli, engaged for the title role of Monteverdi and Ottavio Rinuccini's opera *Arianna*, died just before the Mantuan wedding festivities of Francesco Gonzaga and Margherita of Savoy, for which the opera was written. Her replacement was Virginia Andreini, the *prima donna* of the Fedeli troupe, already engaged to perform in Giambattista Guarini's scripted drama *L'idropica*, the main play of the festivities. She mastered this demanding additional role in the astoundingly short span of six



days. Virginia ("La Florinda") had performed well under pressure before, having achieved a stunning success in the title role of her husband Giovanni Battista Andreini's 1606 play *La Florinda*, which includes an elaborate sung lament. Her performance of *Arianna's* lament represents both a key date in the development of opera and a defining moment in the history of women on the stage.<sup>6</sup> *Arianna* cemented her international reputation and became a routine feature of the repertoires of professional actresses.

Despite these successes, the mixed-gender troupes did not meet with universal acceptance. Their welcome varied widely from nation to nation. Even within the borders of Italy, the leading companies could be lionized in one region and shunned in another. Plays continued to be performed in which the lovers stayed off-stage entirely, and even in commedia dell'arte troupes, men played some female servant roles well into the seventeenth century. As late as 1588, for example, Diana Ponti's Desiosi troupe was licensed to play in Rome only without women (Lea, 270). Often this patchwork pattern of acceptance and exclusion arose from clerical opposition to theater in general and to actresses in particular. Scandalized by the growing power and success of the professional troupes and their intriguing actresses, prelates and theologians denounced the commedia's introduction of women onto the stage. In calling for a ban on all theater in 1578, Cardinal Gabriello Paleotti of Bologna specifically targets the *comici's* "infamous women of ill repute," censuring actresses for earning their living through skills that exert a devastating effect on the morals of their audiences, and especially married men who fall for their charms (Taviani 1969, 39). Nonetheless, by the end of the century actresses were a standard feature of the professional Italian stage, inclusively implicated, rather than singled out, in Juan de Pineda's 1599 long-winded denunciations of the theater as a "devil's workshop" (Taviani 1969, 122). Five years later the Dominican monk Domenico Gori made renewed attempts to rid the stage of "the obscene antics" of the "commedie di Zanni." He warns men of the grave spiritual dangers of marrying an actress, and reminds actresses who perform in lewd comedies that their public words and gestures are as mortally sinful as the private deeds of prostitutes (Taviani 1969, 136–43).

Despite continuing clerical fulminations, there was no going back. The visual records chart the growing confidence of actresses in terms of costume and roles, sphere of action, and stage presence, and confirm the increasing indispensability of women performers at every level of theatrical activity.

6 According to MacNeil, in this performance "the combination of ... rhetorical gesture, seconda pratica music, and commedia dell'arte performance results in a radically new style of music theater that is representational in all its aspects" (2002, 403).

### The Visual Record

Scholars studying women performers have a wide range of two-dimensional art to consider: paintings, drawings, and prints – some belonging to series, others created as single images – as well as rarer examples of three-dimensional art. These images are an invaluable evidential source for the appearance, costume, gestures, and props of early actresses, their stock roles and stage business. Early studies of actresses tended to interpret the iconography literally and to generalize broadly from a limited range of images of often uncertain date or provenance. While the pictorial record is important in assessing women's contribution to early modern theater, effective identification and interpretation require a critical approach to using pictures as historical evidence (as Leik for one points out), and an understanding of the complex issues surrounding gender representation on the early modern stage.

Only rarely does the pictorial record offer a straightforward reflection of early modern performing women. Most obviously, some pictures are modern forgeries, while others have suffered from unreliable restoration or dating, or have been altered by later additions, including texts.<sup>7</sup> Even in a genuine, reliable, and clear picture, women may be cross-dressed or otherwise disguised, and female stage roles are not necessarily played by women. A picture may not necessarily reflect a "historically authentic" performance event; if it does, there may be considerable variation in the degree of authenticity. All early modern pictures are subject to an array of contingencies that include artistic fantasy, iconographic precedents or commissioning pressures, and distortion for stylistic, moralistic, allegorical, satirical, or other reasons. Some depictions of actresses have no known visual precedents; many are pastiches, copies, or adaptations based on earlier works. Such factors are integral to the use of images as historical documents. They do not disqualify a picture from contributing to our knowledge of female performance, and an informed awareness of them can greatly enhance its theater-historical potential. Only a limited amount can be achieved by considering them in isolation. A better approach is to "read" individual pictures of actresses within the context of a wide array of relevant documentation, textual as well as visual.

7 A prime example is the famous "Bayeux painting," showing a crowded stage scene, which traditionally but erroneously has been held to record one of the first northern tours of the *comici*, to France in 1571 and 1572. An unreliable post-sixteenth-century caption identified some of its figures as ten members of the French royal family in the early 1570s collaborating with members of a commedia troupe (Duchartre, 86; Katritzky *Thesis*, 108–11; Leik, 190–6).



Among the best-known images of early actresses are those of the *Recueil Fossard*. The surviving sections of this dispersed and largely lost collection of miscellaneous early modern prints, now mainly in Scandinavia, include a much-reproduced sixteenth-century series of eighteen woodcuts of Harlequin with his Italian troupe of actors and actresses. Elsewhere I discuss the reasons for arranging these eighteen woodcuts to reflect episodes in the three acts of a particular commedia performance (Katritzky 1989). In total, nine male and five female characters, all named, are featured in these eighteen prints (fig. 6.8). My own reading of the plot tentatively distributes these fourteen characters between the household of the two older men, as follows: Signor Pantalon has two male servants, Harlequin and Zany Cornetto; the female characters are his maid Francisquina (top, second from right; also in bottom row), and his wife, Dona Lucretia (center row, last on right). Donna Cornelia (bottom right) could be their daughter or a courtesan; such ambiguity of status is frequent in the iconography. The other older man, Signor Dotour, has two menservants, Francatripa and Philipin; his maid is Licetta (third row, first image). Donna Lucia, either an *innamorata* or a courtesan, is courted illicitly by Pantalon (top, second from left), and officially by Signor Horacio, the friend of Capitan Cocodrillo. Like practically all the males, the Doctor's son, Signor Leandro, dallies with Francisquina, but his wooing of a more credible marriage partner, his social equal Donna Cornelia, in the final picture seems to suggest that this performance will end, as many did, with a marriage. Of the fourteen parts, four are featured in all three acts, and only one of these, Francisquina, is a female role. The other three are principal masks, Pantalone and his comic servants Harlequin and Zany Cornetto. Lucia, who is depicted in acts 1 and 2, and Lucretia, who is depicted in act 2, could double with Cornelia and Licetta, who feature only in the last act. Pantalon, Harlequin, and Zany take part in all three acts, and Leandro in the last two, but the other five male roles could be doubled by three players. Over a third of the players in this performance – five out of fourteen – are women. More significantly, the maid Francisquina is one of four major roles, and women feature in over half of the eighteen pictures which make up this series.

Two prints by the Milanese artist Ambrogio Brambilla represent a compact print series offering valuable visual evidence concerning the gender make-up of commedia dell'arte troupes. One shows five commedia characters in a kitchen, making preparations for a wedding (fig. 6.12). In the second, six newcomers join three of them, namely the comic manservant Burati, Doctor Gratian, and Nespola, in a celebratory wedding dance (fig. 6.13). The six men are three comic servants, two old masters, and a German captain who plays the pipe and tabor. It is harder to categorize the five young women, but they are possibly two maids, Nespola and Balzarina, and three courtesans, Filomena, Venturina,

and Franceschina. Five of the eleven characters are women, and they are central to the narrative (Katritzky 1987).<sup>8</sup>

The best-known series of commedia-related colored drawings is in the undated (probably early seventeenth-century) *Corsini Album* manuscript collection of commedia dell'arte scenarios, probably the working collection of a troupe, or plots poached from the professional stage by some amateur. Whatever its exact theatrical status, it is unique in that each of its 101 scenarios has been provided with its own individual illustrated title page, depicting one scene, or composite scene, from that scenario, enabling the roles of many of the depicted actors and actresses to be identified (fig. 6.14). Another significant, if much less well known category of colored drawings, in the half-century from around 1570 to 1620, is found in albums of a very different type. Genre scenes of mountebank and carnival activity in series of plates depicting Venetian costume were produced for manuscript costume books and *alba amicorum*, pocket-sized friendship albums in which friends and patrons could be requested to enter their names and titles accompanied by short texts, and sometimes suitable illustrations (figs. 6.4, 6.5; also see Mirabella, this volume, fig. 5.2). To create such images, early illustrators looked to sources in art, as well as on the stage itself, to build up their own increasingly strong iconographic traditions and conventions.

While many attempts have been made to identify specific actresses with depictions of performers, only a few sources have any claim to reliability. One of them is McGill University Library's *Featherbook*. This unique album contains pictures painstakingly built up c.1615–18 in mosaic fashion, using small pieces of feather, by the Duke of Milan's head gardener Dionisio Minaggio.<sup>9</sup> Most feature birds and other natural history subjects, but there are also twenty-six human subjects, including fourteen pictures of *comici*. Seven show one actor, two feature two actors, one is of one actress ("Florinda") and four show an actor and an actress (labeled "Trastulo, Ricolina," "Mario, Flavia," "[S]chapin, Spineta," and an uncaptioned pair). The named women bear the stage names of commedia actresses. "Rizzolina" was taken by at least two early actresses, Angela Lucchese and Marina Dorotea Antonazzoni. "Florinda" is Virginia Andreini; "[S]chapin, Spineta," are Francesco Gabrielli and his wife Maria Teresa Gabrielli; and "Flavia" is perhaps Margherita Garavini (Corrigan).

8 Another important series (c.1576–9) survives as fresco paintings on the thirty walls of a winding staircase at the Castle Trausnitz in Landshut, Germany. Many scenes feature women players. Sixteen commedia scenes were also depicted on a ceiling frieze, which has been destroyed by fire (Katritzky 1996, 137).

9 The website <http://digital.library.mcgill.ca/featherbook.html> depicts all the *Featherbook* pictures in color.



Such identifications are far more reliable than those made for some of the better-known paintings featuring commedia actresses. Early modern images of actresses labelled “Isabella” cannot always be identified as Isabella Andreini, who popularized this stage name for female lovers, sharing it with, for example, the Uniti’s Vittoria degli Amorevoli. The routine association of the woman standing in the foreground in figure 6.10 with Isabella Andreini remains conjectural. Accepted images of Andreini, possibly dressed in her stage role of the *innamorata* Isabella, include the portrait busts on the title-page woodcut of the 1601 edition of her *Rime* (see Campbell in this volume, fig. 7.1) and the commemorative medal struck after her death in 1604, and a full-length likeness in the right-hand background of a fresco depicting members of the Medici court, formerly in Sta Annunziata, Florence.<sup>10</sup>

### Women’s Stage Roles in the Visual Record

Portraits or assumed portraits of commedia players are vastly outnumbered by pictures showing unidentified performers, both on- and off-stage. Analysis of the visual record has the potential for clarifying the players’ costumes and stage presence and their contribution to the dramatic effect at hand. The task is more difficult for actresses than actors, for several reasons. On the all-male stage, the presence of men playing women was conventionally limited to a minimum. Men playing men dominated the stage, and their roles were distinguished by easily recognizable stage costumes. Male stock roles rapidly developed stylized stage names, costumes, masks, and other distinguishing characteristics which aid their identification in pictures, even where the context is not obviously theatrical. In contrast, early actresses honed their skills in arenas in which overtly theatrical costume was rarely worn, such as the marketplace, oral tradition, and festivity. Depictions of female carnival masks and mountebanks suggest that even in stage contexts, female performers habitually wore less stylized costumes than men (figs. 6.2–6.4, 6.6). The visual and textual documentation suggests considerable overlap in the names, costumes and social classes of early modern female stock roles, both with each other and with the real-life types they represent. Perhaps because visual recognition is less straightforward for early female players than for actors, there are no detailed studies of female commedia costume comparable to those of its male roles.

For basic classification purposes, my reading of the visual evidence identifies four main categories of costume, none of which is foolproof as a sorting device. They are the elegant upper-class garments worn by the fashionable young

<sup>10</sup> MacNeil 2003, 30–1, 48–50, 117–20, reproduces all three, and several derivative images.

*innamorata* and the respectable married woman; the servant’s simpler and plainer outfit, worn by most maids, nurses, and crones; the provocative and showy costumes of courtesans; and the exotic, usually “Oriental,” garb of the foreign or disguised woman. As with male roles, the majority of female commedia roles fall into the category of servant or served. Often imperious as a mistress to servants and suitors, the *innamorata* featured large in most commedia dell’arte plots, and the actress playing her often dominated the stage and eventually the troupe itself. Typically, the *innamorata* was a marriageable young daughter of Pantalone, Dottore, or other old masters of the *comici*. Many plots concern her complicated, but ultimately successful, search for appropriate marriage partners. Although the *innamorata* generally wore opulent gowns in the height of court elegance, no hard-and-fast rule may be used to separate her role from those of other young females, unlike the distinction between menservants and their masters. The *innamorata*’s costume was particularly flexible, spanning a wide range of garments from the everyday wear of maids and elegant gowns of respectable upper-class women, to the overt stage costume of professional entertainers, such as exotic acrobats, dancers, and musicians, including the dancing, singing *cantarina* (figs. 6.7, 6.8). It is also hard to tell *innamoratas* apart from female mountebanks, who wear elegant gowns in images depicting them playing “respectable” stringed instruments such as violins, in contrast to male musicians on mountebank stages (usually theatrically dressed as commedia menservants and depicted playing many types of instruments) (fig. 6.6; also see Mirabella, this volume, fig. 5.2). This type of gown is worn by many of the Corsini women whose roles can be associated with named female lovers, by reference to the scenarios they illustrate (for two of these, see fig. 6.14). But others wear simpler dress appropriate to pastoral plays, and in the Corsini illustrations, Flaminia, Doralice, and Isabella, while in standard *innamorata* gowns, betray their madness through wild gestures and unkempt hair.

Female servants are as essential to commedia plots as the ubiquitous menservants, typically attending the lovers, performing household chores, transporting messages and objects, or fending off unwanted attentions of the *zanni* and the old men. Maids are more often depicted with props, such as a purse, scissors, dish of food, basket of vegetables, or spindle, that powerfully evoke their sphere of domestic activity and indicate potential or actual stage action. The maids Nespola and Balzarina in figure 6.12 are depicted in their kitchen, one preparing food at a table, the other tending a pot over the fire while repelling a manservant with a draining spoon, actions that suggest their involvement in extended comic stage business, or *lazzi*. Identified by their aproned dresses with neck-ruffs and head-cloths, maids are often depicted hovering behind their mistresses (figs. 6.9, 6.10). Its underplayed theatricality makes the stage maid’s costume especially hard to identify where actresses are not explicitly depicted in performance contexts, or



contextualized by male companions in the strikingly distinctive costume of commedia menservants.

Whether courtesans or not, the stage costume of female lovers was more dependent on context than on role. In the public arena, even the *innamorata* whose reputation is not respectable may wear a respectable, elegant gown (for an *innamorata* who could be a courtesan or a respectable woman, see Donna Cornelia in fig. 6.8, bottom right). The plot summary of scenario 15 of the *Corsini Album* suggests that the female depicted on the right of the title-page illustration is Cintia, a widow who became a courtesan before remarrying. Bare-headed and unmasked, she wears an elegant gown typical of those worn by female lovers of the *Corsini Album*, as does Goltzius's "Venetian Courtesan" (fig. 6.3), whose performative context is given by her male companions Il Magnifico and Zanni, stock commedia roles. This depiction is particularly valuable in specifying the exact profession associated with the depicted woman's costume, and in giving a detailed impression of the type of stage costume associated with the courtesan at a given date, in this case 1581. Notable are the high plumed bonnet, light full-face mask, high, sheer collar, waist sash, richly brocaded floor-length gown, short cape, gloves, and ample range of jewelry. The wide range of dates of related depictions of similar women, evidently also courtesans, by much less gifted friendship album artists, from the 1570s onwards (fig. 6.4) suggests that Goltzius's courtesan is based on a still earlier joint iconographic antecedent. They also demonstrate the difficulty of dating images of this type, because of the longstanding popularity of this costume, originally adapted with only minor modifications for the stage, but increasingly removed from the typical outfit of real-life courtesans as it became a traditional stage costume. Nudity is sometimes associated with the servant role, as with Franceschina's exposed breasts or legs (figs. 6.8 [top row, fifth scene], 6.13), but more often with that of the courtesan, especially in conjunction with opulent clothing, jewelry, or elaborate hairdressing, such as the bleached, curled styles favored by Venetian courtesans (figs. 6.2, 6.5, 6.7).

Despite its popularity in art, it is unclear how much nudity there was on the commedia stage itself. By its nature far less easily identified in pictures, cross-dressing (another form of erotic costuming) was certainly a significant stock-in-trade of the *comici*. Although the visual record is especially hard to interpret in this respect, it is well known that actresses, no less than genuine courtesans, frequently and elaborately disguised themselves as men. "The Harlotts called Cortisane," as Fynes Moryson notes, "commonly weare doblets and Breches under their wemens gownes, yea, I have seene some of them goe in the Company of young men to the Tennis-Court in mens Apparrell ... most commonly wearing doblets and Hose of Carnation Satten, with gold buttons from the Chinne round to the waste behinde, and silke stockings, and great Garters with gold lace both of the same color" (628–9). In figure 6.2 the courtesan, with elaborate horned Venetian hairdo, wears breeches under her

dress, as does many an *innamorata* in the scenarios. In the invaluable *Corsini Album*, the plot spelled out in the text of *L'Innocente Rivenduta* (scenario 61) makes possible the identification of a cross-dressed actress onstage (fig. 6.14, left). Doralice, the boyish, diminutive *innamorata* at the right, has exchanged clothes with the Turk next to her. She wears typical male Turkish costume (slippers, loose knee-length, long-sleeved robe gathered in at the waist, white undershirt, and simple turban). He wears Doralice's dark-sleeved gown with high collar, but betrays himself visually by his beefy physique.

### Exotic Dress: "Turks" and "Gypsies," with Caveats on Reading Iconography

Turkish costume was more usually associated with stage or carnival disguise by both men and women than a stock type in its own right. A frequent disguise, especially for female lovers and maids, was some form of exotic stage dress of more or less Eastern flavor, often Turkish- or gypsy-inspired (fig. 6.1). In addition to its purely visual appeal, Turkish costume carried vivid military and religious connotations.<sup>11</sup> The *Corsini* illustrations demonstrate the popularity of orientaling costume in a performance context. While costumed slaves, gypsies, and Turks of both genders are depicted, these pictures show that these costumes are also favorite disguises of female lovers. Doralice's assumed "Turkish" costume in figure 6.14 is similar to that worn by the *innamorata* Elisa after her capture by the Turks; it is also similar to the garb of Coviello's daughter, an *innamorata* masquerading as the slave-girl Turchetta, whose even shorter version of the "Turkish" tunic is further dramatized with an iron neck-collar (*Corsini* scenarios 53 and 98).

Artists also used the Turkish look for showy, exotic costumes for comic female types in depictions of outdoor parades and carnivals. The curious raised headgear of these women often resembles the Turkish *kashbati*, introduced to the Turkish harem by European concubines in the mid-sixteenth century and featured in the highly influential late sixteenth-century costume plates of Cesare Vecellio (Katritzky *Thesis*, 194). Pictures such as figure 6.1, which shows nine performers, all masked, in exotic costumes with an unmistakable Oriental flavor, suggest that such disguises raise questions that are not adequately addressed by dismissing them as amateur carnival revellers. Where such players appear to be members of a troupe, performing in the open or parading to publicize their skills, it seems plausible to consider the possibility that these women have, as a publicity exercise, substituted exotic disguise for

11 Comedians who experienced the Turkish threat at first hand include Isabella Andreini's husband Francesco, who spent seven years in Turkish captivity before starting his acting career (Duchartre, 231).



the costumes appropriate to their stage roles. Exotic costume would have been the most gorgeous and eye-catching garments possessed by the troupe. By raising more interest with the public than the commonplace costumes of respectable female lovers and maids, while fitting in with the constraints of public decency better than courtesan costume, it would have effectively fulfilled the aims of the parade or open-air performance, which was to attract custom. But even if the comic types depicted are based on real troupes, the artists may have seen them years, even decades, before depicting them. The commedia dell'arte characters featured in such works follow iconographic precedents, sometimes resembling each other down to their individual groupings, gestures, and costumes. Thus, even fairly precise dating of these paintings on stylistic grounds does not always enable the players themselves to be accurately dated.

By the mid-sixteenth century, gypsies were popular stage characters. The illustration to Corsini scenario 21 resembles depictions in costume books of the period. But the appearance of gypsies alongside commedia dell'arte stock types in another painting may have a less straightforward explanation, demonstrating some of the complications involved in using early modern depictions of comic types as documentary information (fig. 6.15). It depicts two Zanni, a ragged child, and three women whose flowing, fringed cloaks and loose, striped robes and circular headdress with chin-cloths correspond to the traditional costume of the female gypsy. The exotic look and the symbolic, allegorical, and moral possibilities of gypsy culture attracted late Renaissance artists. Renowned for their skill in entertaining, fortune-telling, and cheating the gullible, gypsies were pagans who (according to legend) refused to help the Holy Family on their flight into Egypt, then thought to have been their country of origin. In Caravaggio's influential early seventeenth-century painting, *The Gypsy Fortune-Teller*, the gypsy plies her craft, using a flirtatious gesture to cover up the fact that she is subtly teasing a young soldier's ring from his finger. Figure 6.15 also shows a gypsy simultaneously telling and illicitly diminishing the fortunes of her client. Its modern title, *Scene from the Italian Comedy*, has been accepted without question as being an appropriate and adequate description of its subject by the many art and theater historians who have written about it. Barry Wind, who mistakenly identifies the central Zanni as a Pantalone, cites this painting as direct evidence for "the popularity of the fortune telling theme in the [commedia]" and interprets it as depicting "the gulling of Pantaleone by a gypsy" (32).

Investigation suggests a more complex link with the late Renaissance stage. The possibility that the painting constitutes a documentary record of an actual stage performance cannot be entirely discounted. The outfits look authentic, so the question of whether they are real, carnival, or stage gypsies is not resolved on the basis of costume. I would argue that rather than illustrating a dramatic episode played by costumed actors and actresses, the artist may have combined disparate elements from different sources as a suitable vehicle for his visual

message. The painting can be closely associated with a number of interrelated allegorical and popular messages. It comments on Fortuna, the goddess of fortune, and her well-known fickleness. The child holds the whipping rod to a spinning top, associated in Dutch emblem books both with sloth and with the spinning wheel of fortune, also indicated by the central activity of the fortune-telling gypsy women. They dupe the Zanni by their outrageous flirting, which is a cover-up to rob him, thus paradoxically diminishing his fortune in the very act of telling it. Religious, allegorical, and popular, as well as dramatic, readings of the picture are possible. They are not necessarily equally valid, mutually exclusive, or incompatible with the possibility of a relationship between figure 6.15 and the professional stage. The ambiguity of its subject makes this work a particularly clear example of a painting whose use as a visual source for the history of performing women is far from straightforward, despite depicting recognizable stock types and costumes associated with the commedia dell'arte.

### Masks Worn by Actresses

Richards and Richards are among many theater historians who suggest that the women of the commedia dell'arte were only rarely masked in performance (112). Examination of the iconographic material, however, reveals that a significant number of early female commedia characters are depicted with their faces wholly or partially covered by a veil or mask (figs. 6.1–6.4, 6.7). With the male characters, masks are predominantly worn by the old masters and their menservants. With the female characters, too, their range appears to be confined largely to particular types, although unlike the males, the female masked types are by no means exclusively depicted masked, and the wearing of masks appears to be dependent on performance situation as well as role. No masked females are depicted, for example, in *Recueil Fossard* woodcuts or Corsini illustrations, and only very few in peasant or servant dress. In general, the female types depicted with face masks wear the type of rich clothing associated with the *innamorata* or courtesan and appear in outdoor or informal, private indoor settings rather than on the public dramatic stage. At its most discreet the female stage mask is, like the loup, little more than a black eye-mask (fig. 6.2), prompting arguments that such masks are not genuinely theatrical. According to Duchartre, "the tiny black velvet mask, or *loup*, which the women of the *commedia dell'arte* sometimes wore cannot be considered a true mask, for it was used outside as well as inside the theater. The *loup* was as much a part of a woman's dress as her brocade and lace" (266). But the visual record shows that some actresses wore masks that differed from those worn by other richly dressed women. The theatrical mask often covered considerably more of the face than the loup. In numerous pictures the females wear types of black three-quarter masks, more substantial than the elegant loup, typically



covering the nose as well as the eyes, sometimes also extending over the cheeks and upper lip, and often with a moustache attached to it (see fig. 6.4). Although its uneasy contrast to the feminine gown of its wearer provides the modern eye with gender-ambiguous cues, these “twiskes of downy or woolly stuffe covering their noses” (Coryat, 386) may have been intended primarily as germ filters.

More difficult to distinguish in the iconography than black face-masks are pale or flesh-colored face-masks (6.1–6.4, 6.8), and the most discreet form of mask depicted, the veil. Numerous images depict commedia actresses in a full or three-quarter-face flesh-colored moulded mask, veil, or thick make-up, although it is not always easy to distinguish between such facial disguises. In figure 6.1, the women’s pale full-face moulded masks are secured by tapes running under their noses, the right hand woman’s additionally looped below her ears. Others are fastened with tapes tied behind the ears (figs. 6.2–6.4). Courtesans frequently sported masks and veils. The exposed breasts and explicit gestures of the female in the middle of the left-hand performing trio of figure 6.7, who wears a full-face veil, mark her out as a courtesan. Textual records suggest actresses wore veils for their sexual allure, and were found provocative on stage. Members of the Confidenti troupe sent a plea to Ferdinando de’Medici in 1581 to waive certain laws regarding forbidden props and items of costume, and to release one of their actresses, arrested for wearing silver-colored veils, from prison (MacNeil 2003, 210).

### Conclusion

The pictorial record both broadly supports textual evidence that women’s participation varied widely from troupe to troupe, with between a third and half being women, and confirms the increasing prominence of the *prima donna* over the course of the sixteenth century. In erudite comedy, female parts were always played by boys and men, and the plays written for these all-male casts generally held to the convention that wives and romantic heroines should appear as little as possible during a performance, with much of their action related at second hand by maids and servants. Playtexts indicate that the respectable female roles only rarely break free of this convention before the advent of the commedia dell’arte. If they appear on stage at all before the mid-sixteenth century, female characters tend to hover well in the background, preferably framed by a window or door of their own private domestic interior. This theatrical device was extensively developed by commedia dell’arte actresses. Despite Church opposition, they turned the same doors and windows that had marked boundaries for their cross-dressing male colleagues into stepping stones onto center stage (Tylus). On the late sixteenth-century professional stage, although some maids continued to be played by men, key

scenes involving the *innamorata* were increasingly no longer reported at second hand by the maid, but conducted in full view of the audience.

Commedia dell’arte actresses consolidated their on-stage presence by developing sophisticated strategies for circumventing the prejudices against women, and especially against women in public, on the late Renaissance stage, and for overcoming the challenges posed by the heritage of a theater dominated by the need to minimize on-stage female roles. Women players reinforced an increasingly vital and compelling stage presence through audience-pleasing devices such as improvised rhetorical set-pieces, musical virtuosity, and alluring costumes, and by developing a wide variety of both stock and occasional roles, whose costumes, gestures, and theatrical action are reflected in the pictorial record. As the commedia dell’arte *prima donna* became an essential stage presence, artists began to make actresses the focal point of theatrical compositions (figs. 6.9, 6.10, 6.14). Regardless of how closely male artists’ focus on beautiful *innamoratas* reflected the priorities of stage practice, it is clear that the rise of the commedia dell’arte and its actresses promoted the emergence of female stage roles from the margins to the center of theater. Italian women of abundant talents, equal to the challenge of wholeheartedly grasping and exploiting these new theatrical opportunities, stepped triumphantly into the limelight of public acclaim. The visual record complements the textual documentation in confirming that commedia dell’arte actresses became increasingly adept in deploying youth, beauty and talent to successfully negotiate their fair share of the early modern stage.

### Works Cited

- Baschet, Armand. *Les comédiens italiens a la cour de France sous Charles IX, Henri III, Henri IV et Louis XIII*. Paris: Plon, 1882.
- Bevington, David. “The Popular Troupe (1962).” *Medieval English Drama, a Casebook*. Ed. Peter Happé. London: Macmillan, 1984, 162–71.
- Brandt, Britta. *Das Spiel mit Gattungen bei Isabella Canali Andreini, I: Zum Verhältnis von Improvisation und Schriftkultur in der Commedia dell’arte, II: “Lettere” (1607)*. Wilhelmsfeld: Egert, 2002.
- Brown, Pamela. “The Counterfeit Innamorata, or, The Diva Vanishes.” *Shakespeare Yearbook* 10 (1999): 402–26.
- Corrigan, Beatrice. “Commedia dell’arte Portraits in the McGill Feather Book.” *Renaissance Drama* n.s. 2 (1969): 167–88.
- Coryat, Thomas. *Coryate’s Crudities: Hastily Gobled Up ...* [1611] 2 vols. Glasgow, 1905.
- Duchartre, Pierre-Louis. *The Italian Comedy*. New York: Dover, 1966.
- Falconieri, John. “The commedia dell’arte, the Actors’ Theater.” *Theater Annual* 12 (1954): 35–47.



- . "Historia de la commedia dell'arte en España," *Revista de literatura* 11 (1957): 3–37 & 12 (1958): 69–90.
- Ferdinand of Bavaria, Prince. MS Korr.Akt 924 [manuscript travel diary of his 1565–6 journey to Italy]. Munich, Bayerische Hauptstaatsarchiv, Geheimes Hausarchiv.
- Garzoni, Thomaso. *La piazza universale di tutte le professioni del mondo*. Venice, 1585.
- Heck, Thomas F. *Commedia dell'arte: A Guide to the Primary and Secondary Literature*. New York and London: Garland, 1988.
- Herford, C. H. and Evelyn Simpson, eds. *Ben Jonson. An Historical Survey of the Text. The Stage History of the Plays. Commentary on the Plays*. Vol. IX. Oxford: Clarendon, 1950.
- Howe, Elizabeth. *The First English Actresses: Women and Drama 1660–1700*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Katritzky, M. A. "Italian Comedians in Renaissance Prints." *Print Quarterly* IV (1987): 236–54.
- . "The *Recueil Fossard* 1928–88: A Review and Three Reconstructions." *The Commedia dell'arte from the Renaissance to Dario Fo*. Ed. Christopher Cairns. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1989, 99–116.
- . "A Study in the Commedia dell'arte 1560–1620, With Special Reference to the Visual Records." (=Thesis.) DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 1995. Forthcoming from Rodopi Press.
- . "Orlando di Lasso and the Commedia dell'arte." *Orlando di Lasso in der Musikgeschichte. Bericht über das Symposium der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften München, 4–6 Juli 1994*. Ed. Bernhold Schmid. Munich: Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1996.
- . "What did Vigil Raber's Stage Really Look Like? Questions of Authenticity and Integrity in Medieval Theater Iconography." *Vigil Raber: zur 450. Wiederkehr seines Todesjahres (Akter des 4. Symposiums des Sterzinger Osterspiele, 25.–27. 3. 2002)*. K. Eds. Michael Gebhardt and Max Siller. Wagner: Schlern-Schriften 326, 2004, 85–116.
- Lea, Kathleen Marguerite. *Italian Popular Comedy: A Study in the Commedia dell'arte, 1560–1620*. 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon, 1934.
- Leik, Angelika. *Frühe Darstellungen der Commedia dell'arte. Eine Theaterform als Bildmotiv*. Neuried: ars una, 1996.
- MacNeil, Anne. "The Nature of Commitment: Vincenzo Gonzaga's Patronage Strategies in the Wake of the Fall of Ferrara." *Renaissance Studies* 16 (2002): 392–402.
- . *Music and Women of the Commedia dell'arte in the Late Sixteenth Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Marston, John. *The Scourge of Villainie* [1599]. London: Bodley Head, 1925.
- McGill, Kathleen. "Women and Performance: The Development of Improvisation by the Sixteenth-Century Commedia dell'arte." *Theater Journal* 43 (1991): 59–61.
- Moryson, Fynes. "The fourth Part of an Itinerary ..." Manuscript; dated in pencil 1595. Oxford, Corpus Christi College MS. CCC 94.
- Nashe, Thomas. "Pierce Penilesse his supplication to the Divell." [1592]. *The Works of Thomas Nashe*, vol. I. Ed. Ronald McKerrow. Oxford: Blackwell, 1966.
- Nicoll, Allardyce. *Masks, Mimes and Miracles*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1931.

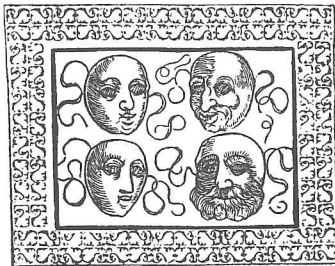
- . *The World of Harlequin: A Critical Study of the Commedia dell'arte*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963.
- Re, Emilio. "Commedianti a Roma nel secolo XVI." *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana* 63 (1914): 291–9.
- Richards, Kenneth and Laura Richards. *The Commedia dell'arte: A Documentary History*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1990.
- Saslow, James. *The Medici Wedding of 1589: Florentine Festival as Theatrum Mundi*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996.
- Schrickx, Willem. "Italian Actors in Antwerp in 1576: Drusiano Martinelli and Vincenzo Beladno (sic=Belando)." *Revue Belge de philologie et d'histoire* 50 (1972): 796–806.
- Scott, Virginia. "'La Virtù et la volupté.' Models for the Actress in Early Modern Italy and France." *Theater Research International* 23 (1998): 152–8.
- Solerti, A. and D. Lanza. "Il teatro ferrarese nella seconda metà del secolo XVI." *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana* 18 (1891): 148–85.
- Taviani, Ferdinando, ed. *La commedia dell'arte e la società barocca. La fascinazione del teatro*. Rome, 1969.
- , and Mirella Schino. *Il Segreto della Commedia dell'arte: La memoria delle compagnie italiane del XVI, XVII, e XVIII secolo*. Florence: La Casa Usher, 1982.
- Tylus, Jane. "Women at the Windows: Commedia dell'arte and Theatrical Practice in Early Modern Italy." *Theater Journal* 49 (1997): 323–42.
- Wind, Barry. "Pitture Ridicole: Some Late Cinquecento Comic Genre Paintings." *Storia dell'arte* 20 (1974): 25–35.



## STUDIES IN PERFORMANCE AND EARLY MODERN DRAMA

General Editor: Helen Ostovich, McMaster University

This series presents original research on theatre histories and performance histories; the time period covered is from about 1500 to the early 18th century. Studies in which women's activities are a central feature of discussion are especially of interest; this may include women as financial or technical support (patrons, musicians, dancers, seamstresses, wig-makers) or house support staff (e.g., gatherers), rather than performance per se. We also welcome critiques of early modern drama that take into account the production values of the plays and rely on period records of performance.



# Women Players in England, 1500–1660

Beyond the All-Male Stage

*Edited by*

PAMELA ALLEN BROWN  
*University of Connecticut, USA*

PETER PAROLIN  
*University of Wyoming, USA*

ASHGATE



© Pamela Allen Brown and Peter Parolin 2005

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior permission of the publisher.

Pamela Allen Brown and Peter Parolin have asserted their moral right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as the authors of this work.

Published by  
Ashgate Publishing Limited  
Gower House  
Croft Road  
Aldershot  
Hampshire GU11 3HR  
England

Ashgate Publishing Company  
Suite 420  
101 Cherry Street  
Burlington, VT 05401-4405  
USA

Ashgate website: <http://www.ashgate.com>

#### British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Women Players in England 1500–1660 : beyond the all-male stage. – (Studies in performance and early modern drama)

1. Actresses – England – History – 16th century 2. Actresses – England – History – 17th century 3. Actresses – England – Public opinion – History – 16th century 4. Actresses – England – Public opinion – History – 17th century 5. Public opinion – England – History – 16th century 6. Public opinion – England – History – 17th century 7. English drama – Early modern and Elizabethan, 1500–1600 – History and criticism 8. English drama – 17th century – History and criticism 9. Women – England – Social conditions – 16th century 10. Women – England – Social conditions – 17th century

I. Brown, Pamela Allen II. Parolin, Peter  
792'.028'082'0942

#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Women players in England, 1500–1660 : beyond the all-male stage / edited by Pamela Allen Brown and Peter Parolin.

p. cm. – (Studies in performance and early modern drama)

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-7546-0953-7 (alk. paper)

1. Theater – England – History – 16th century. 2. Theater – England – History – 17th century. 3. Actresses – England. 4. English drama – Early modern and Elizabethan, 1500–1600 – History and criticism. I. Brown, Pamela Allen. II. Parolin, Peter, 1966– III. Series.

PN2590.A36W66 2004

792'.082'094209031–dc22

2004020756

ISBN 0 7546 0953 7

Typeset by Tradespools, Frome, Somerset.

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Antony Rowe Ltd, Chippenham, Wiltshire.

## Contents

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	vii
<i>List of Musical Transcriptions</i>	xi
<i>Contributors</i>	xiii
<i>General Editor's Preface</i>	xvii
<b>1 Introduction</b> <i>Pamela Allen Brown and Peter Parolin</i>	1
<b>Part I Beyond London</b>	
2 Women and Performance: Evidences of Universal Cultural Suffrage in Medieval and Early Modern Lincolnshire <i>James Stokes</i>	25
3 Payments, Permits and Punishments: Women Performers and the Politics of Place <i>Gwen Williams, Alison Findlay and Stephanie Hodgson-Wright</i>	45
<b>Part II Beyond Elites</b>	
4 The Case of Moll Frith: Women's Work and the "All-Male Stage" <i>Natasha Korda</i>	71
5 "Quacking Delilahs": Female Mountebanks in Early Modern England and Italy <i>Bella Mirabella</i>	89
<b>Part III Beyond the Channel</b>	
6 Reading the Actress in Commedia Imagery <i>M. A. Katritzky</i>	109
7 "Merry, nimble, stirring spirit[s]": Academic, Salon and Commedia dell'arte Influence on the <i>Innamorate</i> in <i>Love's Labour's Lost</i> <i>Julie D. Campbell</i>	145
8 Women Performing Homoerotic Desire in English and Italian Comedy: <i>La Calandria</i> , <i>Gl'Ingannati</i> and <i>Twelfth Night</i> <i>Rachel Poulsen</i>	171



9	Courtly <i>Comédiantes</i> : Henrietta Maria and Amateur Women's Stage Plays in France and England <i>Melinda J. Gough</i>	193
<b>Part IV Beyond the Stage</b>		
10	The Venetian Theater of Aletheia Talbot, Countess of Arundel <i>Peter Parolin</i>	219
11	"Pleaders, Attorneys, Petitioners and the like": Margaret Cavendish and the Dramatic Petition <i>Julie Crawford</i>	241
<b>Part V Beyond the "All-Male"</b>		
12	Staging the Absent Woman: The Theatrical Evocation of Elizabeth Tudor in Heywood's <i>If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody, Part I</i> <i>Jean E. Howard</i>	263
13	Female Impersonation in Early Modern Ballads <i>Bruce R. Smith</i>	281
14	Jesting Rights: Women Players in the Manuscript Jestbook of Sir Nicholas Le Strange <i>Pamela Allen Brown</i>	305
	<b>Afterword</b> <i>Phyllis Rackin</i>	315
	<b>Index</b>	321

## List of Illustrations

2.1	Mistress of ceremonies: Katherine Willoughby (1519–1580), Duchess of Suffolk and Baroness Willoughby de Eresby, of Grimsthorpe, Lincolnshire. Reproduced by permission of the Grimsthorpe and Drummond Castle Trust.	38
5.1	Charlatans on Piazza San Marco, Venice, from Giacomo Franco, <i>Habiti D'Huomini e Donne Venetiane</i> , 1609. Reproduced by permission of The British Library (C48h11).	92
5.2	<i>A mountebank couple on a trestle stage</i> , from the friendship album of Sigmundus Ortelius (dated 20 March 1574). Reproduced by permission of The British Library (Egerton 1191 f.18).	93
6.1	Pieter de Jode after Lodewyk Toeput (c.1550–c.1603/5), <i>Masquerade</i> (1590s?), engraving. Copenhagen, Kongelige Bibliotek ( <i>Recueil Fossard</i> ).	111
6.2	Pietro Bertelli, <i>Zanne with a courtesan, Pascariello with a courtesan</i> (1591), engraved plates from Bertelli's costume book <i>Diversaru[m] nationum habitus, iconibus in ære incisus</i> , vol. 2, plates 67 and 68. Berlin, Kunstbibliothek.	112
6.3	Julius Goltzius, <i>Magnificus larvatus, Scoztum Venetu Larvatum, il Zani famulus</i> (1581), engraving. Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek.	113
6.4	<i>A masked woman flanked by two men in Zanni costume</i> (1596), colored drawing on f48r of a friendship album. Stuttgart, Württembergisches Landesbibliothek.	114
6.5	<i>Freund sein khan nit schaden [it can't hurt to be friends]</i> , colored drawing on f.4v of the friendship album (1583–1601) of Hans Jakob Wintholtz, c.1583. Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek.	115
6.6	Joseph Heintz II (c.1600–78), <i>Carnival in Venice</i> (detail: dancing Zanni and woman on a mountebank stage), oil on canvas. Rome, Gallery Doria Pamphili.	116
6.7	<i>A feast</i> (c. early 1590s?), by or after Marten de Vos (1532–1603; traditionally attributed to Second School of Fontainebleau), oil on canvas. Present whereabouts unknown. London, Sotheby's.	117



## Contributors

**Pamela Allen Brown** is an Associate Professor of English at the University of Connecticut, Stamford, and author of *Better a Shrew than a Sheep: Women, Drama and the Culture of Jest in Early Modern England*. Her publications address women's active roles in popular culture, focusing on the impact of Italian actresses on Shakespeare, female rogues and gossips on Jonson, and female spectators and players on early modern writing and performance. With Jean E. Howard, she is co-editing *As You Like It: Texts and Contexts*.

**Julie D. Campbell** is an Associate Professor of English at Eastern Illinois University. Her areas of specialization include Shakespeare, Renaissance women writers, and Renaissance literary circles. Her translation of Isabella Andreini's play *La Mirtillo* was published by Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies in 2002.

**Julie Crawford** is an Associate Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, where she teaches early modern English literature. She has published articles on a diverse array of topics, ranging from Sidney's sapphics to Mary Wroth's cabinets. Her book *Marvelous Protestantism* will be published by Johns Hopkins University Press this year, and she is working on a second book about women's coteries and the production of literature in early modern England.

**Alison Findlay** is Professor of Renaissance Drama at Lancaster University. She has published work on Shakespeare and his male contemporaries, including the books *Illegitimate Power in Renaissance Drama* and *A Feminist Perspective on Renaissance Drama*, and on women's drama of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. She is currently writing *Playing Spaces in Early Women's Drama* for Cambridge University Press, and *Women in Shakespeare* for the Continuum Shakespeare Dictionary Series.

**Melinda J. Gough** is Assistant Professor of English and Women's Studies at McMaster University. She has published on the Renaissance enchantress in epic and popular drama, the Swetnam controversy and women's popular culture, and the French court ballets and English masques performed by Henrietta Maria. Her essay "'Not as Myself': The Queen's Voice in *Tempe*



*Restored*” (*Modern Philology* 101.1) won the Society for the Study of Early Modern Women’s award for best article published in 2003. Her book in progress focuses on Henrietta Maria and women’s performance in early seventeenth-century France and England.

**Stephanie Hodgson-Wright** is Senior Lecturer at the University of Queensfield with research interests in the field of early modern women’s writing, especially drama. She has edited *The Tragedy of Mariam* (2000), a volume of plays for the Early Modern Englishwoman facsimile series (2000), and an anthology entitled *Women’s Writing of the Early Modern Period 1588–1688* (2002); she also co-wrote *Women and Dramatic Production 1550–1700* with Alison Findlay and Gweno Williams (2000). She is currently preparing a second volume for the Early Modern Englishwoman series and working on a study of liberty and bondage in tragedy by women from 1660 to 1720.

**Jean E. Howard**, William E. Ransford Professor of English at Columbia University, is author of *Shakespeare’s Art of Orchestration, the Stage and Social Struggle in Early Modern England*, and, with Phyllis Rackin, of *Engendering a Nation: A Feminist Reading of Shakespeare’s English Histories*. A past president of the Shakespeare Association of America and one of the co-editors of *The Norton Shakespeare*, she is completing a new book entitled *Theater of a City*.

**M. A. (Peg) Katritzky** is Wilkes Research Fellow in Theatre Studies in the Department of Literature of The Open University, Milton Keynes, and a Research Associate of St Catherine’s College, University of Oxford. Her researches into theater iconography, court festival, the commedia dell’arte, and quacks and mountebanks generally, focus on gendered aspects and early modern transalpine cultural exchanges.

**Natasha Korda** is Associate Professor of English at Wesleyan University. She is author of *Shakespeare’s Domestic Economies: Gender and Property in Early Modern England* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002) and co-editor with Jonathan Gil Harris of *Staged Properties in Early Modern English Drama* (Cambridge University Press, 2002).

**Bella Mirabella** is Associate Professor of Humanities and Literature at the Gallatin School of New York University. She has written about the lives of women in the Renaissance, particularly women and performance. She is co-editor of *Left Politics and the Literary Tradition*.

**Peter Parolin** is an Associate Professor of English at the University of Wyoming. He has published on early modern women and performance and he

has an ongoing research interest in early modern English representations of Italy. His essays have appeared in *Renaissance Drama* and *Shakespeare Studies*.

**Rachel Poulsen** recently completed her PhD at Loyola University, Chicago. She is at work on a book about female homoeroticism in early modern English drama, from its roots in Italian literature through the late Caroline period. Her article “The ‘plentiful lady-feast’ in Brome’s *A Mad Couple Well Match’d*,” a runner-up for the J. Douglas Canfield Award for Postgraduate Scholarship, is forthcoming in the *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*.

**Phyllis Rackin** is Professor Emerita of English at the University of Pennsylvania, where she taught courses in Shakespeare and Renaissance drama for forty years. A former president of the Shakespeare Association of America, she is the author of numerous scholarly articles on Shakespeare and related subjects as well as three books: *Shakespeare’s Tragedies*; *Stages of History: Shakespeare’s English Chronicles*; and *Engendering a Nation: A Feminist Account of Shakespeare’s English Histories*, which she wrote in collaboration with Professor Jean E. Howard of Columbia University. At present, she has just completed a book entitled *Shakespeare and Women*, which will be published in 2005 as part of the Oxford Shakespeare Topics series.

**Bruce R. Smith** is USC College Distinguished Professor of English at the University of Southern California. His books include *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare’s England* (1991), *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England* (1999), and *Shakespeare and Masculinity* (2000). He is at work on a book on passionate perception in early modern culture, focused on the color green.

**James Stokes** is Professor of English, University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. He is editor of the two-volume *REED: Somerset* (1996) and *REED: Lincolnshire* (forthcoming). He has authored numerous articles on the documentary history of medieval and early modern performance and culture.

**Gweno Williams** is Reader in Early Modern Drama at York St John University College. Her main research interest is staging productions of plays by early modern women. In June 2004 she produced a three and a half hour DVD, *Margaret Cavendish: Plays in Performance* (details at [www.margaret-cavendish.net](http://www.margaret-cavendish.net)). In 2002 she was awarded a British National Teaching Fellowship for excellence in university teaching.